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USAID/CAR Bi-weekly Report

Regional

Muslim Religious Leaders Discuss Cooperation in Combating Extremism and on Social Issues at USAID-sponsored Conference

A conference, titled "The Role of Religion in Promoting Peace and Social Partnerships," brought together Islamic religious leaders and government officials from four Central Asian republics from June 8-9, 2006. This USAID-sponsored gathering was the first opportunity for region's religious leaders to meet as a group since the breakup of the Soviet Union fifteen years ago. Participants included former muftis from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan; representatives of an independent union of Kazakh Muslims, Kazakhstan's Muftiyat, Tajikistan's Ismaili Muslim community, a Tajik opposition Islamic political party the Islamic Revival Party; as well as officials from state agencies on religious affairs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Religious leaders discussed issues that are confronting Central Asian societies and identified ways in which they can contribute to resolution of those issues. The conference also laid out a blueprint for the future cooperation

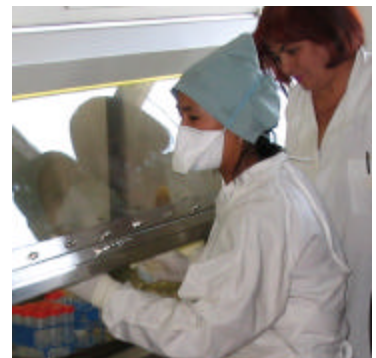
among Islamic leaders in the region. Religious leaders resolved to coordinate efforts for combating the spread of extremism and terrorism in the region, collaborate on labor migration and other social issues, standardize textbooks and curricula used in madrasas, organize student and faculty exchanges between madrasas, and establish regional institutions to facilitate finding solutions to contemporary problems faced by Muslim communities.



Region's religious leaders gathered at a USAID-sponsored conference in early June.
Photo: USAID

Sentinel Surveillance Results Presented in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

National AIDS Centers in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan introduced results of the HIV sentinel surveillance at conferences in May and June. The surveillance was conducted with assistance from USAID through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and focused on the levels of HIV, hepatitis C, and syphilis among intravenous drug users (IDU), prostitutes, pregnant women, and patients of clinics for treatment of sexually-transmitted infections. Results in Uzbekistan showed 20% and 5% HIV prevalence among IDUs and prostitutes respectively. Injecting drug use remained the main mode of transmission. In Tajikistan, surveillance revealed that almost 16% of drug users are infected with HIV and 43% with hepatitis C, while 23% of prostitutes are infected with syphilis. The prevalence of risky practices was found to be very high, while awareness was low about modes of transmission. The surveillance also showed that migrants are becoming a risk group for HIV transmission, and 0.5% of pregnant women were found to be infected with HIV, which is the highest rate in the region.



USAID supports the region's governments to improve the quality of HIV/AIDS data.
Photo: CDC

This was the first sentinel surveillance conducted in Tajikistan. It included two sites: Dushanbe and Khojand. Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan such data is collected since 2004 and currently includes Tashkent City and Oblast, Samarqand, Andijan, and Surkhandarya. USAID, through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), supports the region's governments to improve the quality of HIV/AIDS data by providing training, new equipment, and methodology on HIV sentinel surveillance.



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USAID's Civil Society Partners Celebrate Achievements in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan

USAID's Civil Society Support Initiative held a Local Projects' Fair in Turkmenistan to summarize successes of community development initiatives on June 20. Community activists, NGOs, and local governments, met to discuss their cooperation with USAID's project and lessons-learned and to review successful social, economic, and health activities. Over the past three years, USAID's project, implemented by Counterpart, provided direct benefits to more than 338,000 Turkmen citizens through 140 community action grants worth over \$661,000.

Meanwhile, the Association of Civil Society Support Centers in Kyrgyzstan, with assistance from USAID, organized an NGO Trade Fair in Bishkek on June 22. More than 700 people visited informational booth where fifty NGOs and ten community-based organizations from all oblasts displayed information about their projects and activities. The fair provided a great opportunity for the public, the government, the private sector, and the media to learn about the non-governmental sector's work in the country. Visitors commented that the fair increased their knowledge and understanding about NGO activities in the country.



Civil society colleagues from across the country met for an NGO Fair in Bishkek.
Photo: USAID

Kazakhstan

USAID-Funded Project Gives Students First-Hand Look at Local Government

More than 300 students worked with 270 local government officials in 26 Akimats (councils) during the Student Local Government Days to learn how their government works. The initiative was organized by USAID's Civic Education Project partner IFES, with support by the Ministry of Education. Government employees explained their job responsibilities and talked about the challenges that they face. For their part, students helped the officials with some of the work and provided suggestions for solving issues. "This Student Local Government Day opened our eyes and now students are more aware of state policy," said Ruslan Tleysov, a tenth grade student at School #16 in Pavlodar. Student Local Government Days are part of an ongoing effort by USAID's Civil Education Project to encourage Kazakhstani youth to participate in the development of their government and society. IFES involves local media in the project to bring credit to the local government office and encourage officials to increase transparency and openness.



Students gained first-hand experience by working with local government officials.
Photo: IFES

Kyrgyzstan

USAID Promotes International Religious Freedom Standards and Dialogue on Religion and Government

In June, USAID funded a series of trainings and workshops to promote understanding of religious freedom and address the most pressing religious issues in the Kyrgyz Republic. From June 13-18, USAID provided trainings on international religious freedom standards for a cross section of professionals and students from governmental and non-governmental organizations in Bishkek. The workshop was led by an internationally recognized religious freedom expert, Professor W. Cole Durham, Jr., who provided a broad perspective on religious freedom issues, as laid out in international law.



Participants presented proposals to amend the current Law on Freedom of Conscience.
Photo: AED



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Meanwhile, a series of eight roundtable discussions, organized in cooperation with the State Agency for Religious Affairs, focused on international religious freedom standards, Kyrgyz legislation, and government policies on religion. The workshops were attended by religious leaders, representatives from non-governmental organizations and local government from around the country. During the discussion, participants also provided inputs on drafting changes to the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. Workshop proposals to amend the current law will be presented to parliamentarians and other government and civil society representatives during a conference next month.

USAID Facilitates Preparation of a New Tax Code for the Kyrgyz Republic

A new draft of the Tax Code was presented to Kyrgyz parliamentarians by the Ministry of Finance and the USAID Economic Policy Reform Project at a conference in late May. USAID's project provided substantial technical assistance for development of the new code. The legislation was revised due to a widespread belief among members of the Parliament, Government, business sector, and international experts, that a reformed code would better support business and revenue administration in Kyrgyzstan. The country's current Tax Code, with its more than 700 amendments, ad-hoc exemptions, inconsistencies, and unclear drafting, has left the Kyrgyz tax system unable to generate adequate revenue. The revised code draws on international experience and clarifies the rights and powers of taxpayers and revenue authorities, thereby standardizing application of the tax regime, reducing corruption, and increasing stability of business environment.

Information System and Database to Improve Budget Planning in Kyrgyzstan

USAID's Economic Policy Reform Project, together with the Ministry of Economy and Finance and DFID's technical assistance support for the World Bank Government Structural Adjustment Credit, helped develop a budget preparation and information system that will establish a single comprehensive database to support consistent and reliable data compilation and reporting, as well as a unified and integrated budget process. The system will automatically allocate estimates between programs, ministries, sectors, and functions, based on input of appropriately classified expenditure estimates of administrative units broken down by economic type classification. This improvement introduces an international best practice at the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The USAID project has already developed electronic forms that allow ministries to input and upload budget information.

USAID Will Help the Kyrgyz Government to Conduct Land Reform Pilot

On June 1, the Government of Kyrgyzstan has approved a list of ten pilot communities to test new principles for management and use of land contained in the Land Redistribution Fund. These pilots will be conducted in collaboration between the USAID Land Reform and Market Development Project, the State Immovable Property Registration Agency, and local administrations and communities. Currently 25% of all country's arable land is retained in the state-owned Land Redistribution Fund, which is managed by heads of local administrations. The USAID project will assist the Kyrgyz Government in designing a strategy on the future use of the fund, based on the results of the ten pilots. Each pilot will begin with a survey of the land owned by the Land Redistribution Fund. When the community decides how to use the land, USAID will assist in determining auction mechanisms to sell the lease rights for lands slated for long-term lease. USAID will also help to decide the size, borders, and the lease rights of the lots. Upon completion of the pilots, the USAID Land Reform and Market Development Project, implemented by Chemonics, and local counterparts will submit their findings and recommendations to the Government of Kyrgyzstan.



USAID's project will help test Kyrgyz land reform principles.
Photo: Chemonics

Tajikistan

To Prevent Drug Use among Youth, USAID Helps Introduce New Subjects In Tajik Vocational Schools

The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Tajikistan has recently approved two new subjects for the national vocational school curriculum: the Drug Use Prevention and the Street Business Toolkit. Both subjects



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were developed and piloted by the USAID-funded Drug Demand Reduction Program (DDRP), implemented in part by the Tajik Branch of the Open Society Institute - Assistance Foundation and the Center of Social Development "Accord." The Drug Use Prevention Curriculum was launched on a pilot basis in 11 vocational schools in November 2004. DDRP developed a curriculum for the course, prepared a teacher's manual and a student textbook, and trained school staff to teach the course. Last year, the Drug Use Prevention Curriculum was introduced nationally and is currently taught in seventy-four vocational schools across the country. The second course, the Street Business Toolkit, was included into vocational school curriculum nationwide on May 31, 2006. Developed in cooperation with another project's implementing partner, the program will be implemented as a follow-on to DDRP's Drug Use Prevention course. The Street Business Toolkit Program is a process of long-term cooperation with youth, so-called "accompanied living development". Classes with interactive exercises, independent work, and observation field trips will allow participants to grasp the skills necessary for the planning and development of their own business. By helping teenagers create economical stability for themselves and their families, the course will provide the conditions where fewer young people initiate drug use.



Drug use prevention education has been introduced in 74 vocational schools across Tajikistan. Photo: DDRP

Treatment Support Group Practice in DOTS Districts of Tajikistan

Treatment Support Groups, created by USAID's TB control program in 2005, have observed a 93% improvement in adherence to treatment among patients who had previously reported problems with treatment.

Such result was achieved through a series of trainings on interpersonal communication and counseling provided for Treatment Support Groups by USAID's implementing partner Project Hope jointly with Republican TB Control Center. USAID's program established the Treatment Support Groups, comprised of primary health care (PHC) nurses, in three districts of Tajikistan: Kulyab, Vosse, and Rudaki. The groups deliver highly focused counseling services to patients with behavioral and social problems to ensure treatment completion and provide a model for integration of TB treatment support into the PHC health system contributing to overall sustainability of DOTS Program.

They also work to reduce stigma among the general population towards TB patients, and improve the knowledge and attitudes of health providers. Project HOPE is planning to expand this experience over the country either through its own activities or through sharing experience with other implementing partners. USAID's comprehensive TB control program, through pilot activities, is benefiting approximately 26% of Tajikistan's population.



Vosse's Treatment Support Group discussed their work with a USAID health specialist during a recent visit. Photo: Project Hope

Turkmenistan

USAID Facilitates Avian Influenza Preparedness for Veterinarian Professionals

From June 1-14, USAID's Farmer-to-Farmer Program, implemented by Winrock International, organized a series of lectures on practical techniques of laboratory diagnostics of Avian Flu for specialists from the State Veterinary Service, its laboratory staff, and scholars from the Agricultural University. This was the first Avian Flu preparedness event, focused on veterinary specialists. Fourteen participants from across Turkmenistan gained specialized information regarding the prevention and control of Avian Flu. The program envisions that participants will transfer newly learned methodologies to other specialists in their duty stations across the country. Recommendations by the USAID-funded



At USAID's training veterinarian specialists received information on Avian Flu prevention and control. Photo: Winrock



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experts will also help the State Veterinary Service to compose a comprehensive system against the threat of avian flu pandemic. The Government of Turkmenistan expressed appreciation for the training.

USAID's Implementing Partner Recognizes Best Accounting Professionals in Turkmenistan

In a June 19 ceremony, the Union of Accountants of Turkmenistan recognized the best trainers and accountants of the past year. The union is country's first independent, professional accounting association in Turkmenistan. Through this organization USAID's Enterprise Development Project (EDP) promotes the adoption of International Accounting Standards, trains accounting practitioners, and supports the overall development of an accounting profession. Over the past three years, the union and other organizations have delivered over 70 training courses for more than 1,300 participants, 72% of which have been women. To date, 74 accountants in Turkmenistan have attained Certified Accounting Practitioner (CAP) status through the CIPA-EN program. For a second year in a row, the "Best of the Year" event has been funded by a private company Syscon, a sign that Turkmenistan's private sector placed an increasing value on USAID's accounting training and certification program, one of EDP's composite elements.



Djahan Saparmuradova (in the photo) is one of the many accountants trained by USAID's project in Turkmenistan.
Photo: EDP